

EXHIBIT N

DECLARATION OF KAREN FIREHOCK

I, Karen Firehock, declare as follows:

1. I am the co-founder and executive director of Green Infrastructure Center, Inc. (GIC), a nonprofit based in Charlottesville, Virginia. We have an office and 2 full-time and 1 part-time employees in Providence, Rhode Island and carry out on-going work in that state and others, as described below.

2. The statements made in this declaration are based on my personal knowledge and review of GIC business records.

3. GIC is a member of the National Council of Nonprofits.

4. GIC was formed in 2006 to help local governments, communities, and developers evaluate their green infrastructure assets and make plans to conserve them.

5. “Green infrastructure” is the interconnected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, and other natural habitats; greenways and parks; farms and ranches; and other open spaces that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources, and contribute to people’s health and quality of life. This green infrastructure needs to be planned and cared for just as localities plan for their “grey infrastructure” of roads, power lines, and sewage systems.

6. We provide the communities we work with the tools needed to protect and restore their natural assets, such as economic analysis, mapping, and land-use planning and asset assessment. We help them to execute these plans too. We work at

the regional and local scale in rural, suburban and urban environments across multiple states, including on-going programs in Rhode Island, Virginia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia as well as projects in many other states including, but not limited to Montana, New York, Florida, Puerto Rico, and others. We have a staff of 20 people.

7. GIC participates in the Urban and Community Forestry Program. That's a program run by the U.S. Forest Service that funds efforts by states and partner organizations to plant and maintain community trees, forests, and green spaces, including in disadvantaged areas.

8. The Inflation Reduction Act provided \$1.5 billion in funding for the Urban and Community Forestry Program to support those efforts.

9. GIC relies on funding through that program for many of our projects. That funding has been awarded as grants to states and then to us as state subrecipients. We were awarded several multiyear grants in late 2023 and early 2024, which we draw from the states after they've drawn it from the federal government. Those grants range from about \$200,000 over a year and a half to more than \$2 million over five years. They are hugely important for work and our mission, accounting for 80 percent of our budget. We expanded with new field staff specifically to meet the goals for the IRA funds.

10. We also receive funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Those grants are for technical support to help cities and towns in Virginia to improve policies to protect trees in their communities and for plans such as new tree-canopy

goals for small and rural towns such as Buena Vista, as well as storm recovery plans for hurricane-ravaged Damascus to help restore trees there and the Creeper Trail, which is the town's primary economic driver. This money has been frozen since February 14.

11. We use the funds from our IRA grants to help towns and localities plan and carry out plans for planting more trees and managing the forests they have.

12. For example, last year we announced an initiative with the Mississippi Forestry Commission to help Natchez, Gulfport, and Laurel, Mississippi to plan and manage trees in disadvantaged neighborhoods. That effort will help ensure equitable access to the many benefits healthy trees provide, such as cleaner air and water, cooler summer temperatures, reduced flooding and erosion, and increased property values. That same initiative expanded to three additional communities this spring, including working with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to help manage their forests. The initiative is funded with money from the Inflation Reduction Act.

13. These efforts take time—usually several years—because we have to map existing tree cover, set goals and then plant and care for the trees themselves, which need time to grow. The initiative in Mississippi, for example, is supposed to run through 2027. For our projects to be a success, we need time to build trust before, during, and after the actual planting, especially in the kind of communities where we work. These smaller communities are often overlooked and lack the resources to restore tree cover on their own, many of them still recovering from past hurricanes.

14. I don't know how much time we'll have, though, because the funding for these projects has been frozen by the Forest Service. As a result, the states we work with have been unable to draw funds on the federal grants they were awarded.

15. The states in turn have told us to stop work because they lack the funds to pay. We have a multimillion dollar grant with Virginia, for example, but they've told us to stop work. Mississippi has told us the same thing. Georgia told us we didn't have to stop our projects but that they would not pay bills, until the Forest Service restarts reimbursements. Well, we can't afford to carry out work, place large tree orders for this fall, and set community meetings, when we don't know if we'll be able to draw on the grants we were awarded. We've cancelled many community events and trainings that took months to plan and organize, and now we've let everybody down. And possibly lost their trust in us.

16. Staff at the Forest Service don't know what's going on and haven't been able to say when payments might resume or even whether they will resume at all. They're just being told by leadership that they're having a "pause" on these programs.

17. We are in a crisis at this point. I've already had to furlough four members of our staff to half time status in Virginia and Mississippi. We're lucky that we had a small operating reserve to make it this long, but we can't keep absorbing losses and won't be able to support staff indefinitely.

18. I estimate we're 45 days away from having to lay off staff at this point. The only reason it's not sooner is thanks to what little reserve we have and the fact that Rhode Island and South Carolina have continued to pay us for work, even while

they themselves still can't draw on their federal grants. We don't know how long they will continue to do so, meaning that our work there may have to stop as well.

19. If we did have to lay people off, they probably won't be coming back because they're going to have to find other jobs. Some of our staff are young people who don't own their homes and are early in their careers; they don't have the ability to wait for funds to resume. And it's really hard to hire for these positions and train people up. Each staff person underwent 6 months of training to perform highly technical work for us,

20. We're already feeling the effects in other ways too. For example, now is the time we need to be ordering trees for planting in the fall. And we order a lot of them, so this has to be done well ahead of time. If we bought those trees, and then found out these grants are done, we'd be left holding the bag for hundreds of thousands of dollars. I don't know what we're going to do if payments remain halted.

21. If this funding does not resume, our projects in Virginia, Mississippi, and other states won't either. And if the freeze continues, I don't think we're ever going to regain the trust we built in some of these communities before we started working there.

22. In Mississippi, for example, we've worked with the Choctaw Indians. We had multiple meetings with the tribe and tribal council in the process of getting an agreement drafted to show we were serious and would be helping with them in coming years to manage their forest. And now we can't follow through. If you think about America's history with the tribes—it was hard to overcome. And then at the

eleventh hour, we disappear. That whole relationship and the trust we built won't recover if this continues.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on March 13, 2025.



Karen Firehock